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ABSTRACT

This report on the need for compulsory, standardized procedures for the certification of librarians (1) provides an historical overview of the subject; (2) identifies three types of certification: compulsory, permissive, and voluntary; (3) outlines current certification practices, requirements, and standards for school librarians; (4) reviews the major arguments for standardized, mandatory certification; (5) describes the certification systems used in Great Britain and Canada; and (6) discusses a California proposal for standardized, statewide certification. References are provided. (FM)

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# MANDATORY CERTIFICATION NEEDED IN LIBRARIANSHIP

by

Benjamin R. Williams

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ABSTRACT

Title of Manuscript: Mandatory Certification Needed in Librarianship.

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According to a growing segment of the professional literature, informed practitioners, and the reality of the times, librarianship is in immediate need of compulsory procedures for certification. The purpose of certification is to protect the public through the assurance and confidence that the certified person is competent to perform required duties. Advocates contend that compulsory certification would greatly assist librarianship to rid itself of those individuals who are unqualified and incompetent. Opponents likewise contend that compulsory certification "in states where it exists, has done more to downgrade professional status than improve it." However, the recent push for a new and realistic look at compulsory certification involves a wider range of criterion than competency versus incompetency. Involved also is the quest for elevated professional status based upon improved levels of service, control entry into librarianship and job security.

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Librarianship has long been viewed by many of its harshest critics to be a fortress for the unskilled, inadequately qualified, misguided and incompetent. However like other professions or occupations, librarianship has its share of the highly industrious, the lackadaisical and the mediocre. Accountability and the proving of an organization's benefit to the community it serves, is a necessary key to self preservation. Library budgets of all types presently find themselves subjected to severe reductions as a result of declining financial support. Gone are the days when libraries and other similar agencies, can expect tax payers to continue to blindly support their existence without close scrutiny and continuous, intense self-evaluation. Libraries across the United States presently find themselves endanger of financial extinction and the saddest fact of all is, the lack of public concern this crisis has generated.

According to a segment of the literature, informed practioners, and the reality of the times, librarianship is in immediate need of compulsory, standardized procedures for certification. Certification is a measuring instrument which asserts a person qualified to practice in a specific professional area. The purpose of certification is to protect the public through the assurance and confidence that the certified person is competent to perform required duties. "Certification is distinguished from occupational or professional licensing in that the latter permits only licensed persons to practice under the law, whereas in the case of certification, anyone may practice ..." [1] Advocates contend that compulsory certification would greatly assist librarianship to rid itself of those individuals who are unqualified and incompetent. The resurgence for a new and realistic look at compulsory

certification encompasses a wider range of criteria than competency versus incompetency. Involved also is the quest for elevated professional status, based upon improved levels of service, a standardized, national policy and improved job security.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Provisions for library certification in the United States have been patterned primarily after that of teacher certification. In arguements for and against this type of certification, advocates and opponents often cite the system of certification for teachers as a basis for comparison. During the colonial period a legal basis was developed by the passage of laws certifying early teachers. Early certification laws provided for legal, county and school district certification. Certification had reached the state level by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The beginning of the twentieth century saw state established minimumal requirements attesting to individualized levels of competency. As early as 1909, there existed in California, a County Free Library Law which established compulsory certification requirements for the heads of the state's county libraries.[2] Using teacher education also as a basis of comparison, Charles C. Williamson stated in his Report in Chapter 18, "under the influence of teacher certification, it was but natural that compulsory standards should be widely adopted first for high school librarians."[3] He favorably cited California for taking the first step in compulsory library certification.[4] California's County Free Library Law stressed the major necessity of maintaining a high degree of competency especially at the directorship level. The most important result of this law was that it led to the

creation of a board of library examiners "to pass upon the qualifications of all persons desiring to become county librarians."[5] Wisconsin followed the lead of California by passing a certification law requiring all high schools to employ a teacher-librarian.[6] Thus early teacher-librarians were required to possess the general qualifications of a teacher, plus a library education equal to a four credit course.

## TYPES OF CERTIFICATION

Three types of certification presently exist as a results of the 1965 decision of the Certification Committee of the Library Administration Division of the American Library Association. First, compulsory certification (certification required by law) exist only in 19 of the 50 states as of 1965.[7] This figure has not significantly changed since this time. Secondly, permissive certification (certification legalized by law but not mandatory) authorizes states to issue certificates of certification. Thirdly, there is voluntary certification (certification granted by state level associations). Voluntary certification has been the most used plan in librarianship thus far. Numerous states presently use the voluntary program to satisfy existing legal requirements. On a comparative basis, voluntary certification offers a wider scope than does that of many compulsory plans. Perhaps the most visible disadvantages of voluntary certification are: (A) its lack of an enforcable penalty for non compliance, and (B) it is not a requirement prior to employment. Voluntary certification's most favorable advantage might possibly be that it often serves as an incentive and as a progression plan toward fulfilling legal certification requirements. In some states a combination type system of certification is utilized. Voluntary

guidelines in addition to compulsory laws are interwoven to form an advantageous plan within certain states.

## TYPE OF LIBRARY

Presently, there does not exist a standardized national plan of certification for public librarians. Most public libraries require librarians to possess library school degrees. Generally, those individuals who were graduated from ALA accredited schools are not required to take a written examination prior to employment. Those systems which use a compulsory plan of certification can be penalized for the lack of compliance. This lack of compliance can result in a loss of local, state, or federal aid (or a combination of these). Some states having compulsory certification require that agencies seeking to employ non certified librarians must petition their state educational departments for approval.

According to the literature, it is usually the practice of state certification agencies to provide for the chartering of persons practicing at the time revised legislation is passed. Those librarians chartered by legislation of this type are certified only for their immediate position or grade.

### School Librarians

Certification of various types, among school librarians has been instrumental in establishing a somewhat more even pattern. School librarians are recognized as members of the teaching staff due to the fact that their certification requirements are equivalent to those of their colleagues. The certification of school librarians aims to accomplish the following: (A) activate and encourage continuing education, (B) stimulate professional enhancement, and (C) establish minimum guidelines

for professionals. Certification for school librarians has greatly benefited as a part of teacher certification. Major benefits of school librarian certification derived from teacher certification, have included a closer scrunity of individualized qualifications, frequent revaluations and stimulating educational pressures resulting from continuous change.

The United States Office of Education has classified several types of certificates issued to school librarians. First, there exist a single type of certificate which requires a minimum number of courses and semester hours. This certificate legalizes the services of the librarians to perform his duties within school of the issuring states. Secondly, a gradation of certificates is based and can be converted to higher level certificates through additional educational courses, experience, or a combination of both of these. Thirdly, there exist a certificate necessary for supervisors of school libraries. Fourthly, certification certificates are issued which include in their titles, "audio visual services, instructional materials, and materials centers."[8]

In order to eliminate some of the bureacratic red tape and confusion associated with these certificates, the majority of states presently issue the single certificate. This single certificate requires basic preparation and empowers local school boards with the authority to: (A) set educational qualifications, (B) set experience qualifications, necessary for further advancement. In addition, state and local salary requirements provide extra incentives for the acquiring of advanced qualifications.

At the present time, only a small number of states specifically require audio visual service as a part of the title of the certificate, a number indicated as a requirement for school library certification preparation in the selection and utilization of non book materials or use the broader term "instructional materials.[9]

As in most areas of certification, changes continue to occur both in certificate titles and in individualized requirements.

School librarian certification differs significantly from the many forms of compulsory certification for public librarians. School librarian certification generally does not presently have to adhere to specific requirements enacted into law by state governmental bodies. Generally, school library certification does not require specifics beyond citizenship and minimal age. State educational agencies are empowered to set requirements for, renewal, issuring, and revoking the certification for all professional school employees within their state.

Historically, certification requirements based on the number of semester hours in library science were contingent upon two factors. First, certification requirements were based upon the number of students served by the library. And secondly, certification requirements were based upon the time spent in the library by the librarian who divided his time between the classroom and the library. In 1918, national recognition of this plan achieved joint acceptance by the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Education Association (NEA) of these two standards. During the 1920's and 1930's, regional accrediting agencies adopted similar standards of evaluation.[10] Some form of certification of school librarians had been established in all states within the union by 1940. Unfortunately, the types of requirements and preparations educationally or other wise, varied greatly from state to state. By the 1960's, school libraries had been developed to serve the centralized elementary school. As a result of this new development, the originally proposed certification of librarians had been conceived primarily for the secondary level. School librarians in numerous

states presently are generally certified for both the secondary and elementary school levels. The main difference existing between certification requirements for elementary and secondary schools can be found in the teaching certificate held by the librarian. In addition, the content of the library science curriculum and the required number of hours may also differ.

By 1969, it became clear that earlier efforts by ALA and NEA that resulted in the development of workable standards, that have given strong initiative to a needed review of all existing school library certification programs. The early 1970's revealed that Alaska remained the only state having no certification requirements for school librarians.[11]

## Academic Librarians

Generally, academic librarians are not subjected to the requirements of certification; eventhough, permissive and voluntary certification plans usually are the two types used in academic institutions. Very few states presently include academic librarians in their compulsory certification plans. Those states where mandatory certification for academic librarians is required include Virginia and Georgia.[12-13]

## Need for Mandatory Certification

Proposed standardized procedures for the mandatory certification of librarians is not new ... or revolutionary. Charles C. Williamson, in his landmark report, "Training for Library Service," published in 1923, included mandatory certification as one of his major recommendations. Williamson stated, "a system for certification for librarians should be developed ..." However, at present, mandatory certification remains a

topic of procavative, professional conversation rather than a serious consideration bodering on national acceptance. In the Williamson Report of 1921 and 1923, the author stated that a general plan for mandatory certification was presented to the American Library Association informally in 1919.[14] However, after consideration by committee, the major part of the plan was discarded but the certification proposal in theory, did survive.

Thus the early movement for mandatory certification of librarians did result in a few sporadic efforts and in a voluntary plan for national certification. But the key to putting this plan into effect required substantial funds to at least partially establish and implement a workable system. A few trend setting states did establish mandatory certification requirements for the directorships of public libraries. But a nationally directed plan for standardized, compulsory certification for librarians did not materialize.

Advocates of mandatory certification maintain that a standardized, national certification system would:

1) Strengthen the acceptance of advanced academic degrees as valid criteria for professional librarianship.

2) Define clearly the responsibilities and characteristics of "professional librarianship".

3) Provide a national, uniformed standard of competency.

4) Provide substantial job security.

5) Protect the public from incompetent practioners.

Opponents contend that mandatory certification:

1) Is professionally unnecessary.

2) Is unenforcable.

3) Would make for fewer professional jobs since the definition of "professional Librarianship" is ambigious.

4) Will eliminate "equal opportunities" in library employment.

5) Is simply another meaningless boundary to seperate the college educated staff from the clerical staff.

6) Provides an easy way out for employers who wish to purge trouble makers of unpopular individuals.

Properly administered, mandatory certification of librarians could be a very positive force for professional advancement and improve levels of service. Although a librarian without certification would not be prevented from practicing librarianship, under a national system, only certified librarians would be licensed by the certification agency. Presently, there is growing acceptance of standards in the professional world which measure individual competency and established forms of accountability. It is unrealistic to think librarianship will continue to be an excluded occupation/profession regarding professional accountability. It is essential under such a system that the control of the certification process be authorized and maintained by the library profession. Dynamically qualified practioners should be the primary decision maker regarding the certification procedures rather than theorist and politicans. At present, there does not nationally exist a strong, organized attempt to develop a workable certification system.

The awarding of certification should be:

1) Based upon demonstrated competence.

2) A graduate of a library school or equally qualifying exeprience (satisfactory to board approval).

3) Limited to three years instead of life.

4) Based upon constructive, involvement in related continuing education.

5) Based upon community service involvement.

Whenever an individual requests a renewal of certification, the certifying body should base renewal upon:

1) Recent continuing educational endeavors.

2) Professional work experience.

3) Contributions to professional advancement and publications.

4) Renewal certification period limited to three years.

## CERTIFICATION IN GREAT BRITIAN

Critics of compulsory certification often cite the system used by Great Britain as the predicted disaster awaiting American librarianship. A general over view of this system indicated that one of the most bitterly debated provisions of this certification procedure was its mandatory examinations. The British Library Association (BLA) provided for the examinations, the registration of qualified librarians, and the maintaining of a Registry of Chartered Librarians. Controversy and bitterness were caused by the examination among the library profession and in British library schools. The library schools cited several reasons for their dislike of the examinations:

> The examinations which the students are forced to take differ greatly from the syllabus originally proposed by the Library Association. In addition, the examinations bears little resemblance to library school courses. And examinators are non-librarians with no practical knowledge of librarianship.[15]

As a result, the schools claimed that examination questions were unrealistic and biases.

The use of examinations by the British library system was originally specified in the charter granted by the Library Association in 1898.[16] According to the original charter, one of the purposes of the Association was to conduct examinations in library science and to issue certificates to those passing competence requirements. A register of chartered librarians is maintained by the Library Association. In order to be admitted to the registry, an applicant must meet a language requirement, age, service conditions, pass the first professional examination, the registration examination, the final examination, and specialist certificate examination in certain subjects.[17]

Upon close observation, it appeared that most of the dissatisfaction concerning the examinations existed between what was taught and whether or not the students gained from the academic experience. It should be kept in mind that simply passing a written examination should not be the sole criterion for an individual's passing or failing to be certified as a librarian! The ability to get along with people, provide a high level of professional service, serve as a positive, professional example, and provide innovative leadership is not measurable on a written examination.

In addition, the resulting dissatisfaction and controversy further led some British recruiters to disregard specific requirements among Library Association applicants. Presently, the Council for National Academic Awards in Britain has been instrumental in revamping the structure of the Library Association after the American model. Many of the problems of the British Library Association originally lay in the fact that British library education was very rigid, lacked experimentation and did not lend itself to adaptation. The main objective of the instructors had been to insure that their students possesses the knowledge to pass the upcoming certification examinations.

## CANADIAN LIBRARIAN CERTIFICATION

Perhaps a more reasonable and realistic approach to library certification can be found in Canada. In 1955, the Canadian Library Association (CLA) created a certification committee for the purpose of developing national standards of certification. National standards of certification were needed to serve as guidelines by which regional associations might pattern their own certification. A single national standard was adopted by the Canadian Library Association in 1959. This single national standard provided for the recognition of the B.L.S. or M.L.S. from Canadian and United States Library school as the primary requirement for professional entry. In addition to this national standard, several localized provinces set up provincial certification requirements. These provinces include British Columbia and Ontario. Similar to the British Library Association's Registry for Librarians, but more realistically adapted and less complicated is the Institute of Professional Librarians. The Institute of Professional Librarians was developed as a special feature of the Ontario plan. As a result, the national standard serves as the primary educational requirement for membership and provides for the evaluation of equivalent qualifications, subject to board approval. The Canadian Librarian Association, as a unification move, decided that professional librarians working in the field from 1959 to 1961 would become chartered members of the Institute of Professional Librarians.

## MANDATORY CERTIFICATION - A CALIFORNIA PROPOSAL

In an attempt to develop a state wide "code of ethics for librarians and a mechanism of implementing it," the California Society of Librarians Committee of Professional Standards has given serious consideration to the

problem of compulsory certification. As early as August 1973, the Committee began development of a report on the certification issue. A statement of professional ethics was presented to CSL in August 1975, and was adopted by the membership. As a continuation, it was agreed that a detailed program of certification should result from the final proposal. It was originally thought however, that the simplest way of implementing a plan for state certification was to have the Board of Library Examiners create a "Registry of Librarians." California law would have accommodated this but it would not have been effective for numerous reasons. As a result, a totally new proposal and program had to be created.

A proposal of certification was developed because it was felt "that in carrying out CLA's purpose "to promote the development of library service of the highest quality and maximum availability for all residents of California," a system of evaluation and accountability was necessary.[18] Originators of the plan felt that a library school degree was not enough, basic competency required continuous upgrading and periodic evaluation.

The lack of certification by a librarian would not completely bar an individual from practicing librarianship in California. However, under the proposal, only a certified librarian could hold a professional position in libraries receiving state financial assistance.

Criticism against this proposal was strong and intense! The primary reasons cited for opposing it were related to the detailness of the plan. The proposal's criterion for basic competency included:

1) A graduate degree in library science, or a school librarian's credentials of special qualifications.

2) Applicants possessing qualifications other than by ordinary academic routes should appeal to the Board.[19]

In developing requirements for the renewal of a certificate, it was suggested that the Board require the following:

1) That librarians show evidence of having kept current professionally during the length of their certification.

2) It was suggested that "librarians should have worked at least a quarter of the time and should have completed at least one course in continuing education during each year.[20]

The proposal for compulsory library certification in California failed. Two main reasons mentioned for this failure were: (A) New programs requiring new regulations were not popular at this time, and (B) the proposal for mandatory certification should have been tried through existing agencies.[21]

Recently an ad hoc certification committee of the California Librarians Association conducted a survey of 27 states regarding library certification. The survey found that mass confusion exists. The results of this survey indicated that 19 of the 27 states responded with the following:

1) Most agreed that a "properly administered" certification law does or could have a positive effect on services.

2) The survey found decertification provisions to be rare in the United States, and no state had ever decertified a librarian.

3) When asked if certification laws have improved the quality of library service, Connecticut replied with a strong no, several states said yes and no, and one of them, Washington -- found the results "very difficult to assess."

4) Massachusetts stated that its certification law was not effective due to being voluntary - not mandatory.

5) Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Indiana said their certification laws had improved service. Most felt certification had worked when applied to state aid.[22]

The most frequent suggestions for the improvement of procedures of certification were:

1) Make it mandatory.
2) Require the M.L.S. for all school librarians.
3) Revamp all job classification systems.
4) Explore alternatives to academic credit-based certification.
5) Eliminate lifetime certification.
6) Include continuing education as a requirement for librarians.[23]

Librarianship, like many other professions is daily bombarded with thousands of printed words and numerous complexed types of technology. It is constantly changing and often demands instantaneous, knowledgable responses. Under these circumstances, it is grossly unrealistic to believe that certification should not be limited to a shorten, specified amount of time. Hopefully, this would aid in eliminating the totally theoretic and unfamilar approaches often used by numerous administrative supervisors who have been away from the public orientated arena so long, they cease to be an asset.

The Medical Library Association and the American Association of Law Librarians have both adopted certification plans. Although these associations provide no penalty for noncompliance, they have improved standards of librarianship by requiring evidence of special training, experience and knowledge. School librarians are required to be certified in many states as well as public librarians. The increasing questions of

responsibility, accountability, and competency are very pertinent issues in librarianship. Each of these are individual issues which must be addressed. Compulsory certification requirements will not sorely convince the general public, employees and other professionals that librarians are indeed professionals. However, ... the question of compulsory certification is no longer, is it necessary? The immediate question is ... how soon will the profession adopt standardized procedures for it?

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